FOREIGN AFFAIRS

THE CIA AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

Robert M. Gates

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Robert M. Gates

THE CIA AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

Over the years, public views of the Central Intelligence Agency and its role in American foreign policy have been shaped primarily by movies, television, novels, newspapers, books by journalists, headlines growing out of congressional inquiries, exposés by former intelligence officers, and essays by "experts" who either have never served in American intelligence, or have served and still not understood its role. The CIA is said to be an "invisible government," yet it is the most visible, most externally scrutinized and most publicized intelligence service in the world. While the CIA sometimes is able to refute publicly allegations and criticism, usually it must remain silent. The result is a contradictory mélange of images of the CIA and very little understanding of its real role in American government.

Because of a general lack of understanding of the CIA's role, a significant controversy such as the Iran-contra affair periodically brings to the surface broad questions of the proper relationship between the intelligence service and policymakers. It raises questions of whether the CIA slants or "cooks" its intelligence analysis to support covert actions or policy, and of the degree to which policymakers (or their staffs) selectively use—and abuse—intelligence to persuade superiors, Congress or the public. Beyond this, recent developments, such as the massive daily flow of intelligence information to Congress, have complicated the CIA's relationships with the rest of the executive branch in ways not at all understood by most observers—including those most directly involved. These questions and issues merit scrutiny.

II

The CIA's role in the foreign policy process is threefold. First, the CIA is responsible for the collection and analysis of intelli-

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gence and its distribution to policymakers—principally to the president, the National Security Council (NSC) and the Departments of State and Defense, although in recent years many other departments and agencies have become major users of intelligence as well. This is a well-known area, and I will address it only summarily.

Second, the CIA is charged with the conduct of covert action, the one area in which it implements policy. This is a subject so complex and so controversial as to require separate treatment elsewhere. Because of the media's focus on covert action, however, it is worth pointing out in passing that over 95 percent of the national intelligence budget is devoted to the collection and analysis of information. Only about three percent of the CIA's people are involved in covert action. By citing those figures, I do not pretend that covert action is not an important aspect of the CIA's activities. It certainly attracts the most attention and controversy. However, it is useful to have some perspective on its relative importance in terms of resources and the overall scope of the agency's activities.

Third, and most significant, the CIA's role is played out in the interaction, primarily in Washington, between the intelligence community and the policymaking community. It is in the dynamics of this relationship that the influence and role of the CIA are determined. The agency's effectiveness depends on whether its assessments are heeded, whether its information is considered relevant and timely enough to be useful, and whether the CIA's relationship with policymakers, from issue to issue and problem to problem, is supportive or adversarial. It is this dynamic interaction of intelligence and policy that is the least well understood, and it is this area that I will examine here.

The director of central intelligence serves both as director of the Central Intelligence Agency and head of the U.S. intelligence community. This community includes the CIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), the National Security Agency, the FBI and the intelligence components of the Departments of State, Treasury, Energy and the four military services. Of these, only the CIA is completely independent of any policy department or agency, and only it accepts requests for intelligence support from throughout the executive branch. The director of central intelligence and the CIA serve as the principal conduits of intelligence to the president and the members of the National Security Council.

The CIA devotes the overwhelming preponderance of its resources to the collection and analysis of information in order to learn the capabilities and intentions of adversaries of the United States, to forewarn of hostile actions against this country from whatever quarter, and to forecast and monitor political, economic and military developments worldwide that have potential to affect American interests or security. The CIA also endeavors to determine and respond to policymakers' longer-range requirements for information and analysis.

What is intelligence information and how is it used by the policymaker? The CIA's information comes from satellites, from newspapers, periodicals, radio and television worldwide, from diplomats and military attachés overseas and, of course, from secret agents. All of this information, billions of bits and pieces of data on global developments and issues of interest to the United States, flows to Washington, where analysts with expertise in scores of disciplines sift through, examine, collate and try to make sense of it. The CIA then reports its findings to policy officials and to the military services.

What clearly distinguishes information as suitable for intelligence exploitation is its relevance to U.S. policy and interests. It is the comprehensiveness of the CIA's collection and analysis, the agency's focus on the national security interests of the United States and the advantage of its having knowledge before anyone else that make the CIA's intelligence valuable to the policymaker. Furthermore, the CIA often makes a contribution simply by organizing facts in a clear and concise way, by providing the same facts to a range of different organizations, by identifying the important questions—and by trying to answer them.

This information finds its way to the policymaker in several ways. First, intelligence on day-to-day events and developments around the world is provided to senior officials daily or even several times a day. Early each morning a written briefing is delivered to the White House for the president. As directed by President Reagan in 1981, officers of the CIA's analysis directorate also fan out across Washington each morning to share copies of the president's briefing with the vice president, the secretaries of state and defense, the national security adviser and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. During crises, situation reports are provided every few hours.

Second, the CIA contributes analysis to policy papers, by describing both current events and potential opportunities or

problems for the United States. Nearly all NSC and sub-cabinet meetings begin with a briefing by the director of central intelligence or a subordinate expert.

Third, national intelligence estimates can play an important role in the making of policy. An estimate provides a factual review of a subject and forecasts future developments. Consensus among contributing analysts is welcome where it is genuine, but it is not sought at the expense of clarity or the airing of disagreements. Analytical mush is helpful to no one. In recent years a high premium has been placed on the presentation of diverse points of view and alternative scenarios—the different ways events may play out, and with what likely consequences. But, always, a "best estimate" is offered; the intelligence community owes the policymaker that.

These estimates—more than a hundred were done last year—are prepared by analysts from different intelligence agencies under the supervision of the senior substantive expert in the intelligence community, known as the national intelligence officer. Estimates are the most formal expression of the intelligence community's views. All of the intelligence agencies of the government both contribute to and coordinate what is written in national estimates. The best known of these are the annual estimates on Soviet strategic military forces.

Fourth, policymakers receive specialized assessments by individual agencies. The CIA's assessments and research papers are the products of the largest intelligence analysis organization in the world. The range of issues is breathtaking—from strategic weapons to food supplies, epidemiology to space, water and climate to Third World political instability, mineral and energy resources to international finance, Soviet laser weapons to remote tribal demographics, chemical and biological weapons proliferation to commodity supplies, and many, many more. I should note also that other intelligence agencies, such as the DIA, the military service intelligence organizations and the State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research, prepare an extraordinary array of assessments for their respective departments and organizations.

III

Obviously the preceding review is a textbook description of the role of intelligence. It is neat, unambiguous, clinical, noncontroversial, even commendable—and highly misleading. It does not address central questions such as whether certain

users of intelligence seek, not data or understanding, but support for decisions already made; whether they selectively use or misstate intelligence to influence public debate over policy; whether they disingenuously label intelligence they dislike as too soft, too hard or "cooked"; whether some intelligence officers are addressing personal agendas or biases. It does not reveal the implications for intelligence and policy of a CIA director who is held at too great a distance from the president, or of one who is too closely associated. It does not treat policymakers' frustration with constantly changing evaluations or with analysis that is just plain wrong, or the use of intelligence as a political football in struggles between government departments or between the executive and legislative branches. The attitudes and actions of CIA officials and policymakers that lie behind these and many similar issues, and the interaction among them, comprise the dynamic of the relationship—what Professor Yehoshafat Harkabi of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem describes as "the intelligence-policymaker tangle."[1]

Sherman Kent, a professor of history at Yale who became a senior analyst in the Office of Strategic Services and was later director of the CIA's Office of National Estimates, wrote in 1949:

> There is no phase of the intelligence business which is more important than the proper relationship between intelligence itself and the people who use its product. Oddly enough, this relationship, which one would expect to establish itself automatically, does not do this.[2]

The fact is that, over the years, the policymaker and the intelligence officer have consistently (and with frighteningly few exceptions) come together hugely ignorant of the realities and complexities of each other's worlds—process, technique, form and culture. CIA officers can describe in excruciating detail how foreign policy is made in every country in the world save one—the United States. By the same token, as suggested by Professor Harkabi, the unhappiness of intelligence people "swells when they compare the sophistication and advanced methods employed in collection of the information and the

[1] Yehoshafat Harkabi, "The Intelligence-Policymaker Tangle," *The Jerusalem Quarterly*, Winter 1984, pp. 125–131.

[2] Sherman Kent, *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy*, Hamden (Conn.): Archon Books, 1965 edition, p. 180.

production of intelligence against the cavalier fashion or improvisation with which policy decisions are many a time reached."[3]

Bookshelves groan under the literature of proposed rules of engagement to be followed when these two worlds collide. In 1956, for example, Roger Hilsman wrote that intelligence producers must "orient themselves frankly and consciously toward policy and action . . . adapting tools expressly to the needs of policy."[4] A more recent intelligence monograph argued that "the intelligence producer should initiate no direct interaction with his consumers, but rather should respond to requests for data and analysis."[5]

Sherman Kent was perhaps the first of the early intelligence commentators to make the case for a more direct and intensive interaction between policymaker and intelligence officer, even while arguing that a firm line must exist between the roles of each. Warning that overprotecting the objectivity of the intelligence analyst could be likened to piling armor on a medieval knight until he was absolutely safe but completely useless, Kent concluded that too much distance posed the greater danger to effective analysis. Even so, he foresaw a troubled relationship—that intelligence officers' skepticism of the objectivity of policymakers, and the latter group's consequent resentment, would stultify any free give-and-take between them; that policymakers would see the very existence of CIA assessments as an insult to their intellectual capabilities; that the security concerns of each party would encourage wariness and reticence.[6] And, in truth, these and other difficulties still greatly influence the CIA's role in foreign policy process.

IV

The institutional autonomy of the American intelligence service—of the CIA—is unique in the world (with perhaps the single exception of the Soviet KGB). While this confers certain advantages, above all independence, such autonomy also imbues the CIA-policy community relationship with a significant

[3] Harkabi, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

[4] Roger Hilsman, *Strategic Intelligence and National Decision*, Glencoe (Ill.): The Free Press, 1956, p. 182.

[5] Center for the Study of Intelligence, *The Impact of Intelligence on the Policy Review and Decision Process*, part two, Central Intelligence Agency, March 1980, p. 7.

[6] Kent, *op. cit.*, pp. 167, 193–95.

adversarial as well as supportive content. The policymaker has a long list of grievances, many legitimate, some not.

Policymakers legitimately want intelligence information that will inform and guide their tactical day-to-day decision-making. In some areas, the CIA can and does meet their needs. For example, in 1980, thanks to a very brave man, the agency was able to provide policymakers with knowledge of the step-by-step preparations for the imposition of martial law in Poland. In early 1986 it was able to document, in extraordinary detail, electoral cheating in the Philippines. There are even some areas where CIA intelligence is so good that it reduces policymakers' flexibility and room for maneuver.

Yet I would have to acknowledge that there are countries and issues important to the United States for which tactical intelligence remains sorely deficient, and here the complaints of policymakers are justified. The CIA's capabilities have improved much in recent years, but they are still uneven in quality. And no matter how good CIA intelligence is, there will still be surprises or gaps.

It is no surprise that few policymakers welcome CIA information or analysis that directly or by implication challenges the adequacy of their chosen policies or the accuracy of their pronouncements. Indeed, during the Vietnam War, this was a constant issue. On the other hand, I concede that on more than a few occasions, policymakers have analyzed or forecast developments better than intelligence analysts. And, truth be known, analysts have sometimes gone overboard to prove a policymaker wrong. When Secretary of State Alexander Haig asserted that the Soviets were behind international terrorism, intelligence analysts initially set out, not to address the issue in all its aspects, but rather to prove the secretary wrong—to prove simply that the Soviets do not orchestrate all international terrorism. But in so doing they went too far themselves and failed in early drafts to describe extensive and well-documented indirect Soviet support for terrorist groups and their sponsors. Far from kowtowing to policymakers, there is sometimes a strong impulse on the part of intelligence officers to show that a policy or decision is misguided or wrong, to poke an analytical finger in the policy eye. Policymakers know this and understandably resent it. To protect the independence of the analyst while keeping such impulses in check is one of the toughest jobs of intelligence agency managers.

In this connection the policymaker sometimes has the sense

that the CIA is attempting, at least by implication, to "grade" his performance. Further, the policymaker is often suspicious that when the CIA's analysis suggests his policy is failing or in difficulty, these conclusions are widely circulated by the agency, with malice, for use as ammunition by critics of the policy in the executive branch, in Congress or among the public. These suspicions are magnified by leaks that pit the policymaker against the CIA in a contest for political advantage. And the policymaker often believes the CIA itself is a source of these leaks.

Often policymakers, facing a situation of extreme delicacy with another country, especially where U.S. law or political sensitivities may be involved, will caution analysts as they write or brief: "Now, you have to be careful what you say about this—let's work it out together beforehand." And the CIA, while protecting its independence, does try to be careful and to take the legitimate concerns of policymakers into account. But that is little solace to a policymaker who is politically at the mercy of any CIA briefer who goes to Capitol Hill.

Many policymakers believe the CIA allows its biases to dominate its reporting. Who would disagree that the CIA officers have views and biases, and that they try to promote them? But the CIA is not monolithic; there is a wide range of views inside on virtually every issue. Indeed, internal debates are fierce and sometimes brutal—after all, the stakes are very high. A classic example was the debate over the validity of the Sino-Soviet split in the early 1960s. A more recent one was the bitter internal disagreement over who was behind the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II. The CIA is not a place for the fainthearted. The agency has elaborate procedures for reviewing assessments to filter out individual bias and make its reporting as objective as possible. And when the CIA sends out a provocative analysis by an individual, it tries always to identify the analysis as a personal view so that a reader will know it has not been through the above-mentioned review process or given a seal of approval by the agency.

More serious is the accusation that an institutional bias affects the CIA's work. I believe there probably is bias in some areas, in a broad sense. Although the agency was severely criticized for underestimating Soviet missile deployments in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it is probably regarded today as more skeptical than most observers of Soviet intentions, as more cynical about the public posture of other governments when

contrasted to their overt and covert actions, as more doubtful about the ease and speed with which the United States can usually affect developments overseas, and, fairly consistently, as tending to see perils and difficulty where others do not. This was the case during the Vietnam War, when it was a source of great bitterness.

Suspicion that the CIA's assessments are biased is especially great in areas where the CIA is involved in covert action. There are several reasons, however, why such suspicion is greatly overdrawn. First, analysis and operations are carried out by two completely separate elements (or directorates) within the CIA. There are long-standing cultural as well as bureaucratic differences between the two branches. There is—unfortunately, in my view—little flow of people serving in one directorate to positions in the other. Thus the analysis of developments in countries where covert activities are under way is done by people with no role or stake in the operations. Contrary to the case in earlier days senior officials in the analysis directorate review and comment on covert action proposals, but few subordinate analysts are involved and no one doing the analysis feels compelled to defend the success of a covert program. A common source of tension is an analysis that is far less optimistic than the director or operations people would wish—but, by policy, the analysis stands. Another safeguard of objectivity where covert action is involved is the recognition inside the CIA that intelligence work in these areas is bound to be scrutinized for signs of bias with special care by readers in the executive branch and especially in the Congress.

The impatience of policymakers with intelligence—with the CIA—is intensified by the fact that analyses and forecasts, often based on incomplete or ambiguous information, are sometimes wrong, and often change or are revised to take account of new information or new analytical techniques. CIA assessments of Warsaw Pact strength have changed on several occasions, complicating the task of U.S. negotiators in the Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions talks in Vienna. Similarly, the agency often revises its assessments of Soviet strategic weapons as new information becomes available. The CIA does not acknowledge error gracefully, and often does not forewarn policymakers of revised views before the information is published. A policymaker who has made decisions or developed a negotiating strategy based on one assessment, only to see it change or to

find that it was wrong, will not think fondly of the CIA or soon wish again to proceed on its assurances or assessments.

As I suggested earlier, a special criticism by policymakers is that the CIA is too frequently a voice of gloom and doom. For policymakers who must try to find solutions to intractable problems or a way out of a no-win situation—for example, various conflicts in the Middle East—the CIA's forebodings and pointing out of perils and dangers are of little help and may be highly irritating.

The CIA's relationship with Congress also is a special problem for policymakers, for several reasons, and it profoundly influences the agency's role. Virtually all CIA assessments go to the two congressional intelligence committees. Most go also to the appropriations, foreign relations and armed services committees. Eight congressional committees get the CIA's daily national intelligence report. In 1986 the CIA sent some 5,000 intelligence reports to Congress and gave many hundreds of briefings. All this is new, having developed over the last decade or so. As a result, and thanks to their staffs, many senators and representatives are often as well if not better informed about the CIA's information and assessments on a given subject than concerned policymakers. Moreover, this intelligence is often used to criticize and challenge policy, to set one executive agency against another, and to expose disagreements within the administration.

Imagine the reaction of the Ford Administration in the mid-1970s when it went to Congress to get additional military aid for Cambodia, only to be confronted by the legislators with a new intelligence assessment that the situation was hopeless. Imagine President Carter seeking a U.S. troop cut in South Korea only to find Congress aware of a new intelligence estimate that concluded that there were more North Korean divisions than was previously estimated. Imagine the reaction of a secretary of defense, seeking funds for a new weapon, only to be told on the Hill of intelligence that the Soviets could neutralize the weapon.

Most specialists writing about the change in recent years in the balance of power between the executive and Congress on national security policy cite Watergate and Vietnam as primary causes. I believe there was a third principal factor: the obtaining, by Congress in the mid-1970s, of access to intelligence information essentially equal to that of the executive branch.

This situation adds extraordinary stress to the relationship

between the CIA and policy agencies. Policymakers' suspicions that the CIA uses intelligence to sabotage selected administration policies are often barely concealed. And more than a few members of Congress are willing to exploit this situation by their own selective use of intelligence that supports their views. The end result is a strengthening of the congressional hand in policy debates and a great heightening of the tensions between the CIA and the rest of the executive branch.

The oversight process has also given Congress—especially the two intelligence committees—far greater knowledge of and influence over the way the CIA and other intelligence agencies spend their money than anyone in the executive branch would dream of exercising, from expenditures in the billions of dollars to line items in the thousands. Congress has been immensely supportive and steadfast over the past ten years in providing the resources to rebuild American intelligence. But I suspect it causes policymakers considerable heartburn to know that Congress may actually have more influence today over the CIA's priorities and its allocation of resources than the executive branch.

The result of these realities is that the CIA today finds itself in a remarkable position, involuntarily poised nearly equidistant between the executive and legislative branches. The administration knows that the CIA is in no position to withhold much information from Congress and is extremely sensitive to congressional demands; the Congress has enormous influence and information yet remains suspicious and mistrustful. Such a central legislative role with respect to an intelligence service is unique in American history and in the world. And policymakers know it.

V

Now, let me turn to the CIA's role and relationship with the policymaker as seen from the agency's vantage point. In each of the five administrations in which I have served there have been a number of senior policymakers (at the level of assistant secretary and above) who were avid users and readers of intelligence and who aggressively sought CIA analysis and views. These policymakers have dedicated considerable time to discussing substantive and policy problems with CIA officers. The agency has had unprecedented access to the Reagan Administration, from the president on down, especially when presenting analysis, and daily contact with the most senior officials of

the government, including the vice president and the secretaries of state and defense. Administration officials have often directly tasked the CIA and offered reactions to the intelligence they read—and they have read a great deal. This is true also of their senior subordinates, with whom the CIA is in constant contact. This has contributed enormously to improving the relevance, timing and substance of intelligence analysis and other CIA support. It is a dynamic, healthy relationship, even though it is focused primarily on current issues.

This preoccupation with current reporting is, from the CIA's perspective, a major problem. If, as I have been told, the average tenure of an assistant secretary in government is 21 months, a short-term focus is understandable; but it is nevertheless lamentable, and ultimately very costly to the country. One of the CIA's greatest concerns over the years has been the unwillingness or inability of most policymakers to spend much time on longer-range issues—looking ahead several steps—or in helping to guide or direct the agency's long-term efforts. For many years the CIA has struggled, largely in vain, to get policy officials to devote time to intelligence issues other than those directly related to a crisis. Agency officers work hard to ascertain what is required of them: what policymakers' priorities are, what issues or problems the CIA should address, how the CIA can help the administration.

One reason Congress has assumed a larger role in these areas, in my view, is that policymakers in successive administrations have largely abdicated their intelligence-guidance responsibilities. For many years, trying to get senior policy principals to attend meetings to discuss longer-range intelligence requirements has been an exercise in frustration. Beyond the lack of help on requirements, the CIA gets little feedback on its longer-range work that might help improve its relevance to policymakers' needs. The CIA has been more aggressive in recent years in trying to engage policymakers on these matters, and key figures in the Reagan Administration have shown some interest in selected long-range problems, but such interest remains exceedingly, dangerously rare.

In part because of insufficient familiarity with intelligence work, too many policymakers arrive at their posts with an unrealistic expectation of what the CIA can do. When this expectation is disappointed, it often turns into skepticism that the agency can do much of anything. The apparent lack of CIA access to Soviet Politburo discussions, for example, leads some

policymakers to question whether anything the agency says about Soviet intentions or politics has value, regardless of its other sources of intelligence. Similarly, the CIA has difficulty forecasting coups (which, of course, usually come as a surprise also to the targeted leader) or the results of difficult decisions not yet made by foreign governments.

It has been my experience over the years that the usual response of a policymaker to intelligence with which he disagrees or which he finds unpalatable is to ignore it; sometimes he will characterize it as incomplete, too narrowly focused or incompetent (and sometimes rightly so); and occasionally he will charge that it is "cooked"—that it reflects a CIA bias. In my 21 years in intelligence, I have never heard a policymaker (or anyone else for that matter) characterize as biased or cooked a CIA assessment with which he agreed. On subjects such as Vietnam, various aspects of Soviet policy and behavior, Angola, Lebanon and the effectiveness of various embargoes or sanctions, as well as on a number of other events and issues, the CIA's analysts have drawn conclusions that have dashed cold water on the hopes and efforts of policymakers. Sometimes the CIA analysts have been wrong, more often they have been right; but on problems both large and small the agency has not flinched from presenting its honest view.

There is no charge to which those in the CIA are more sensitive than that of cooking intelligence—of slanting its reports to support policy. Every director since I joined the CIA has been accused of this at one time or another. Therefore, it is important to understand the distinction between personal and institutional views. National intelligence estimates are reviewed and coordinated by a dozen agencies; CIA assessments are widely reviewed inside the agency but almost never even seen by the director before being published and circulated. As noted earlier, all go to several committees of Congress, where they are scrutinized.

These formal assessments must be distinguished from personal views expressed by individuals at all levels of the agency, from analysts to senior operations officers to the director. More than once, the late Director William Casey (and probably his predecessors) approved an estimate with which he disagreed personally, and separately conveyed his personal view to policymakers. I have no doubt that in policy discussions he expressed his own views, which, on occasion, differed from the agency analysis. Lest this raise eyebrows, it is worth recalling

that in 1962 Director John McCone disagreed with the entire intelligence community over whether the Soviets might install missiles in Cuba. He told President Kennedy they would, and he alone in the executive branch was right. As long as all points of view are fairly represented and reported, the director of central intelligence—the president's chief intelligence adviser—is entitled (even obligated) to have and to put forward his own views. As Professor Henry Rowen of Stanford University recently wrote: "A CIA director is not supposed to be an intellectual eunuch."[7] Sometimes the director's personal view is insightful and correct—as in McCone's case; sometimes it is not.

I must add also at this point that the views of the director of central intelligence and of the CIA are sometimes overshadowed or set aside by policymakers or their staffs in favor of unanalyzed reporting or the assessments of other sources, or of interpretations of their own that support policy preferences or actions. I believe this played an important role in the Iran arms sales affair, as the CIA's formal assessments were misused or ignored by individuals pursuing their own agenda. For example, no analytical expert in the CIA believed in 1985 that Iran was losing the war, and only one or two believed Iranian support for terrorism was waning. And no CIA publication asserted these things. But this was by no means the first instance of selective use of raw reporting or assessments. I have seen it done routinely in five administrations, on large issues such as Vietnam and the Soviet Union, and on lesser ones as well.

Policymakers have always liked intelligence that supported what they want to do, and they often try to influence the analysis to buttress the conclusions they want to reach. They ask carefully phrased questions; they sometimes withhold information; they broaden or narrow the issue; on rare occasions they even try to intimidate. The pressures can be enormous. This is where the integrity of intelligence officers, bolstered by a natural tendency to resist pressure and an often adversarial bureaucratic relationship, comes into play to protect the independence of the agency's assessment.

But, overall, the dialogue between policymakers and intelligence officers is normal and healthy, and it usually improves the CIA's assessments and makes them more useful to policy-

[7] Henry S. Rowen, letter to the editor, *The New York Times*, Sept. 13, 1987, section 4, p. 34.

makers—even while objectivity is preserved. CIA officers know that policymakers are often trying to influence an assessment, but that does not render their information and insights irrelevant or off limits.

A final thought: to attempt to slant intelligence would not only transgress the single deepest ethical and cultural principle of the CIA, it would also be foolish—it would presuppose a single point of view in an administration and would ignore the reality of congressional readership. Indeed, in my opinion, the sharing of intelligence with Congress—where members of both parties, with a wide range of views and philosophy all see the information—is one of the surest guarantees of the CIA's independence and objectivity. As Director William Webster has said:

> We intend to "tell it as it is," avoiding bias as much as we can, or the politicization of our product. Policymakers may not like the message they hear from us, especially if they have a different point of view. My position is that in the preparation of intelligence judgments, particularly in national intelligence estimates, we will provide them for the use of policymakers. They can be used in whole or in part. They can be ignored, or torn up, or thrown away, but they may not be changed.

VI

The foregoing describes the realities of the CIA's role in the making of American foreign policy. I have tried to go beyond the mechanics and the headlines to identify the stresses, tensions, rivalries, enduring complaints and relationships—the pulling and hauling, day in and day out—that determine the CIA's role and its impact. Some CIA analyses are better than others; some intelligence experts are better than others; estimates sometimes alleged to be politicized or biased usually are not at all—sometimes they were just not very well done. But unevenness of quality should not be confused with politicization.

The CIA's autonomy is unique in our government, and its relationship with the legislature is unique in the world. The CIA's relationships with other elements of the executive are a dynamic blend of support and rivalry, of cooperation and conflict. The challenge to intelligence managers is to manage these relationships so that all interactions—supportive and adversarial—end up promoting a better understanding of an ever more complex world around us, and hence contribute to better-informed decisions and policies.

The real intelligence story in recent years is the significant improvement in the quality, relevance and timeliness of intelligence assistance to policymakers—a story that with rare anecdotal exceptions cannot be publicly described, in contrast to the publicity surrounding controversial covert actions, problems between the CIA and the Congress, and spy scandals. The CIA cannot advertise better collection or intelligence analysis. CIA officers understand this political reality, but it is imperative that Americans know that the CIA's primary mission remains the collection and analysis of information. This is the CIA's principal role in the making of American foreign policy. The president, the policy community and the Congress—albeit sometimes with clenched teeth—depend upon the CIA, task it and look to it more each day. The CIA attracts America's most capable young people, who find their work with the agency to be an exceptionally challenging, honorable and consistently fascinating career. As John Ranelagh observes in his recently published history of the CIA, "In its moments of achievement as well as condemnation, the agency was a reminder that it was a faithful instrument of the most decent and perhaps the simplest of the great powers, and certainly the one that even in its darkest passages practiced most consistently the virtue of hope."[8]

The United States has the finest global intelligence service in the world. Faithful to the Constitution and the law, it helps to safeguard our freedom against our adversaries and helps the policymaker understand and deal with the often dangerous world around us. The CIA is America's first line of defense—its eyes and ears. And the agency's deepest commitment, to borrow a phrase used by Eric Larrabee to describe George Marshall, is "to speak truth to power."

[8] John Ranelagh, *The Agency: The Rise and Decline of the CIA*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987, p. 733.